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THE PHYSICIAN.

No. V.

ON POULTICES

ON many occasions a poultice is the very best application which can be used, but there are some little circumstances in the mode of preparing it, which are often neglected ; and frequently it is a matter of considerable importance, for the practitioner, to find any member of a family sufficiently informed on this humble subject, to carry his directions properly into effect. On this account I have selected the subject of poulticing for the present number.

Suppose, then, that a person says to a surgeon, "I wish you would examine my knee, which has been very ill for some days, and now I can scarcely stand at my business." The surgeon examines it, and finds a prominent, hard, hot tumor, surrounded by a circumscribed redness. "This," says he, "is only a boil, you must poultice it to-night, and I will call in the morning and see how matters go on." He calls, according to appointment, and learns that the poultice had been applied, that it gave immediate relief, and the patient was greatly better for two or three hours afterwards ; that then the pain began to increase, till it amounted to absolute torture, and he had not slept a wink the whole night. Now, what has been the cause of all this change from relief to pain ? Simply this ; the poultice when applied, was so trifling in quantity, that it would scarcely have filled a table spoon. It consequently soon dried up, and instead of being a bland, emollient, and grateful application, had become as rough and harsh, as so much pounded freestone. This is quite a common error in applying a poultice—*there is not enough of it* ; and another equally common mistake is, that it is too stiff. A poultice should be considered as a local tepid bath ; but how can it act as such, if it be made as stiff as bird-lime ?

Let it be a general rule then, in using this application, that it be plentiful enough, and that its consistence be just so tenacious as that it will not run. I must remark, however, that in some cases the part is so exquisitely tender, that it will not bear the *weight* of an ordinary poultice ; and under such circumstances, it must be made small, and repeated every two hours, using warm fomentations at every fresh application.—There is another caution also which I must give, which is—never to take off the old poultice, till the new is ready to supply its place. I must further state, that whenever a poultice becomes unnecessary, it becomes also injurious ; and, therefore,

if too long persisted in, may prove in the end as hurtful, as it was before beneficial.

The most ancient cataplasm* on record, was composed of figs; and, indeed, a roasted fig is a popular remedy at the present day, for small boils and swellings about the toes and fingers. I refer to the application prescribed to Hezekiah, of which an account is given in the Second Book of Kings, the 20th chapter, ending at the 7th verse.

An enumeration of all the substances which have been used as the basis or occasional ingredients of poultices, would include almost every production of the animal and vegetable kingdoms. The *Materia Medica*, however, of this important class of applications may be limited to small bounds. The best of all poultices for general use, is composed of boiled bread and milk. It is necessary, however, that the bread be sweet; for if sour, it would prove irritating. A similar precaution is necessary with respect to the milk; and it should be remembered, that if this kind of poultice be kept too long applied, it sours from the heat of the part, and may then prove injurious. In very warm weather, or when milk is not to be had perfectly new, it may often be more judicious to use water in its stead. Oatmeal porridge, too, serves excellently well, and forms the common poultice among the poor. Cheekweed, groundivy, and other herbs, are of no value for ordinary purposes above an oatmeal poultice; but in some ill conditioned and painful ulcers, henbane, hemlock, stramonium, poppies, and other narcotic plants, are serviceable. Carrots, grated down very small, or well boiled and mashed, often form an excellent application; and turnips, if not stringy, are perhaps equally good. Flaxseed meal, or flaxseed bruised and mixed with the ordinary bread poultice, is a useful addition, probably from the oil and mucilage it contains. A little lard or oil being mixed with the bread or porridge poultice, or spread on its surface, often proves a very soothing addition; and the poultice-cloth being oiled, helps to prevent evaporation, and thus keeps the application longer soft.

Sometimes collections of matter are slower than usual in coming to a head, (as it is termed), and in such a case, it is of service to make some stimulating addition to the cataplasm: for which purpose a *raw* onion, chopped small, or well bruised and added to it just before application, answers remarkably well. The yeast or barm poultice is suited also to such circumstances; but in general its use is limited to gangrenous af-

* Cataplasm is a more elegant and classical term than *poultice*, but its meaning is pretty much the same. It comes from the Greek *καταπλάσσω*, to spread like a plaster.

fections, though in a large proportion of these, it is much too stimulant and irritating, and excites the living parts beyond what they can bear.

I have hitherto alluded to *hot*, but sometimes *cold* poultices are recommended, such as raw potatoes grated down, for small burns and scalds; or pounded ice mixed with lard, in the same affections. Goulard water combined with crumbs of bread, is used as a night application to the eyes in Ophthalmia. The alum curd also, made by beating up the white of an egg with a bit of alum, may be considered as a similar application. It is a cold astringent cataplasm. It is usual to put these latter compositions into a little muslin bag, before applying them to the eye; but it is perhaps better to apply them in the usual way, having previously placed a bit of wet gauze over the eyelids.

Cataplasms of a different kind are sometimes had recourse to, for causing redness, heat and irritation of the skin. Various acrid herbs have been used for this purpose, especially several of the Ranunculus tribe; but the substance most convenient and useful, is common flower of mustard. Poultices made of this ingredient are named *sinapisms*; *SINAPIS* being the Latin name of the mustard plant. *Sinapisms* are often used with great advantage, applied to the soles of the feet, in affections of the head, and in fevers, when the stupor is considerable; and they are particularly serviceable in those rheumatic, and spasmodic pains of the chest, which so frequently simulate inflammation of the pleura and lungs. When applied, they soon produce heat, and pain, resembling that of a blister, and, indeed, if kept on too long, they do blister the skin; but this must be prevented by their timely removal, since blisters thus produced are often very difficult to heal. To make a sinapism, take some stale loaf crumbled down small, and an equal quantity of flower of mustard; mix them together, in a bowl, with a sufficient quantity of vinegar, to form them into the consistency of an ordinary poultice; and then spread the mixture on a cloth of the intended size, to the thickness of about half an inch. Sometimes a little salt is added, and sometimes scraped horse radish, to make it more pungent. The introduction of a little Cayenne pepper would perhaps answer better; but there is seldom occasion for any addition. Bruised garlick is sometimes useful, when similarly applied. Applications not of the poultice kind, can sometimes be more conveniently used than the sinapism, and even with speedier effect. Flannel, for instance, wrung out of warm oil of turpentine, or even out of hot spirits, and then dusted over with pepper, may be applied to the pained part as long as it can be easily borne. Oil of turpentine, in which cantharides have been infused, acts very rapidly. I

shall conclude by observing, that various accidents have occurred, by heating oil of turpentine over a fire, or by bringing a candle near it, when it was using. The slightest contact of flame sets it on fire in an instant, and it burns with the greatest fury. When intended to be heated, it should be poured into a cup or slop-bowl, and that be placed in a basin of hot water, as long as may be necessary.

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EXCURSIONS IN ULSTER.

LETTER VII.

Donegall, 27th July, 1825.

DEAR G—,

AFTER some deliberation, we at length determined to return to Belfast, by Derry and the Giant's Causeway; and had arranged to set out yesterday morning, for Donegall. This plan we afterwards changed, and agreed to go down to Bundoran, a bathing village, about four miles off, on Donegall bay. As we passed the salmon leap, on our way, we stopped to examine it in the hope of seeing the fish rise; which is said to be very interesting, not only on account of the number of salmon struggling to get up, but from the high fall and rapid stream which they have to encounter. But on arriving at the fall, we were disappointed by finding that it was not the proper time of the tide; for the fish can only be seen at the period of high water, when the rising of the tide below the fall, makes the passage practicable, by reducing the height of the leap, and rendering the current less impetuous. Calculating that the tide, which now begun to flow, would be at the proper height on our return, we proceeded to Bundoran.

At Finner church, about two miles from Ballyshannon, we quitted the car which had brought us so far; and, desiring the driver to meet us at Bundoran, walked over to the sea side, intending to proceed on foot for the remainder of the way, along the shore. The place where we joined the sea was at a small bay, along what is called the Tullin strand, to the left of extensive sand hills of the same name, the materials of which are only bound together by scattered plants of the *Arundo Maritima*, (sea red grass,) and seem as if a very slight breeze would put them into motion, carrying desolation over the neighbouring country. The sand here appears well fitted for the manufacture of glass; for which purpose we were told quantities of it are shipped off from the coast. From this bay, to very near Bundoran, the shore is formed of a chain of perpendicular limestone cliffs, rising abruptly from the sea to a considerable height; their bases washed by the Atlantic ocean. Our attention, as we walked along, was in one place directed to a curious natural arch, worn by the sea in the cliff, which has acquired the name of the Fairy's Bridge. Of this it will be very difficult to give an idea by a mere verbal descrip-